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NOTES ON CHAUCER

I. "A CAVE UNDER A ROCK Y-GRAVE"

Ten Brink has shown that Chaucer in writing the story of Ceys and Alcyone in the *Book of the Duchess* drew material both from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book xi, ll. 410-748, and Machaut's *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse*.¹ In his discussion Ten Brink makes the statement that in referring to the dwelling of the god of sleep Chaucer combines descriptions given by Ovid and Machaut. Though this is true, it involves a question concerning the reading of Chaucer's MS of Ovid. Lines 155-56 are from Machaut:

Til he com to the derke valeye
That stant betwene rockes tweye.

The description taken from Ovid is in lines 163-64:

. . . . a cave
That was under a rokke y-grave.

This *cave under a rock* depends upon a variation in the texts of Ovid. The line from which this is taken reads:

Tecta petit iussi sub rupe latentia regis.
—*Met.* xi. 591.

Most modern texts read *sub nube* instead of *sub rupe*. But as evidence that some of the MSS read *sub rupe*, I quote the following note from Heinsius: "*sub nube latentia*] De nube nugae sunt. Scribe sub rupe cum primo Gronovii, quarto Mediceo, Rottendorph. Graeviano et aliis duobus: fec. Pal. et duo alii, *sub nocte*: frustra."² Clearly Chaucer's MS read *sub rupe*.

II. BUSIRIS IN THE MONK'S TALE

In the story of Hercules in the *Monk's Tale* (ll. 113-14) Chaucer has confused the two episodes of Busiris and Diomedes. Professor Skeat³ explains the confusion as follows:

¹Ten Brink, *Chaucer Studien*, pp. 7-12.

²Nic. Heinsii commentarius in P. Ovidii Nasonis opera omnia, ed. Joh. Masson, 1758, p. 665.

³Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer*, V, 232.

Here Chaucer has confused two stories. One is that Busiris, a king of Egypt, used to sacrifice all foreigners who came to Egypt, till the arrival of Hercules, who slew him. The other is "the eighth labour," when Hercules killed Diomedes, a king in Thrace, who fed his mares with human flesh, till Hercules slew him and gave his body to be eaten by the mares, as Chaucer *himself* says in his translation. The confusion was easy, because the story of Busiris is mentioned elsewhere by Boethius, Bk. II, pr. 6, in a passage which Chaucer thus translates: "I have herd told of Busirides, that was wont to sleen his gestes that herberweden in his hous; and he was sleyn himself of Ercules that was his gest."

This confusion might more naturally have arisen from a misunderstanding of the following passage in Ovid's *Heroides*, epistle IX, ll. 67-70:

Non tibi succurit crudi Diomedis imago,
Efferus humana qui dape pavit equas,
Si te vidisset cultu Busiris in isto,
Huic victor victo nempe pudendus eras!

Every reader of Ovid knows that he must be on the watch if he is always to recognize a character under the various names which the poet gives him. So in this passage, the two statements might seem to bear a close relationship, the second confirming the thought suggested in the first and referring to the same person under a different name. Confusion of names was not uncommon in the Middle Ages. A notable instance is that of Walter Burley (1275-1345?), a commentator on Aristotle and a scholar of great fame, who in his *De vita et moribus philosophorum* confused Livius Andronicus with Livy, the historian, and Horatius Flaccus, the poet, with Horatius Pulvillus. That Chaucer, who was not a professional scholar, should have made such mistakes is therefore not surprising.

Though Chaucer's selection of the name Busiris rather than Diomedes may have been mere chance, it is probable that the choice was made designedly to avoid confusion with Diomedes the Grecian hero, whom Chaucer knew in Benoit and whom he afterward used in his own story of *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹ It is unlikely that Chaucer was acquainted with the name Busiris in any connection which would necessarily indicate that he could not be the same person as the tyrant Diomedes mentioned in the *Heroides*. Of all the works in

¹ See G. L. Kittredge, *The Date of Chaucer's Troilus and Other Chaucer Matters*, Chaucer Society, 1905, p. 67.

classical and mediaeval literature containing references to Busiris,¹ there is no probability that Chaucer knew any except the *Metamorphoses* and *Ars amatoria* of Ovid and the *De consolacione philosophiae* of Boethius. These three he must have known, but in none of them is the story of Busiris given in detail. The references to him are as follows:

Ergo ego foedantem peregrino templa cruore
Busirin domui ?

—*Met.* ix. 182–83.

Dicitur Aegyptos caruisse iuvantibus arva
Imbribus atque annos sicca fuisse novem,
Cum Thrasius Busirin adit monstatque piari
Hospitis adfuso sanguine posse Iovem.
Illi Busiris “fies Iovis hostia primus”
Inquit “et Aegypto tu dabis hospes aquam.”

—*Ars amatoria* i. 647–52.

I have herd told of Busirides that was wont to sleen his gestes that herberweden in his hous; and he was sleyn himself of Ercules that was his gest.—Chaucer's *Translation of Boethius*, Book II, pr. 6.

A casual reading of these references gives no distinct impression of the identity and story of Busiris. Chaucer might have read them and still not have realized that Busiris was any other than the tyrant whom Hercules fed to his own mares. The similarity of the two stories easily tends to confusion: both are labors of Hercules, both are instances of tyrants slain for ruthlessly murdering human beings. If Chaucer mistook the two names in the *Heroides* as referring to one person, his recollection of the passages in the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ars amatoria*, and the *Boethius* would not correct his error. So, as he knew of another Diomedes with whom this one might be confused, and did not know of another Busiris, he would naturally choose the distinctive name.

This supposition that Chaucer would choose a name about which he thought there could be no confusion is not merely a fanciful one.

¹ For a list of such references see Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griech. u. röm. Mythologie*, under “Busiris.” It is possible that Chaucer may have known the following works in which there are references to Busiris, though there is no evidence of any knowledge of these works in his writings: Virgil *Georgics* 3, 5; Claudianus in *Rufinum* i. 255, in *Eutropium* i. 159; Macrobius *Saturnalia* 6, 7; Hyginus *Fab.* 31, 56, 157. In regard to Chaucer's knowledge of these writers see Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, II, 250, 255, 277, 278, 287.

We have evidence of what he did under circumstances where there might be uncertainty as to identity. In the *Knight's Tale*, ll. 1204-61, he stops in the midst of his story to explain that in referring to Daphne, who was turned into a tree, he does not mean the goddess Diana:

There saugh I Dane, y-turned til a tree,
I mene not the goddesse Diane,
But Penneus doughter, which that highte Dane.

Professor Skeat¹ mentions the confusion of names in the story of Hercules as evidence that Chaucer must have written part of the *Monk's Tale* before 1380, for in his translation of Boethius the name is given correctly:

He overcomer, as it is seyde, hath put an unmeke lord foddre to his cruel hors; *this is to syen that Hercules slowh Diomedes and made his hors to freten him.*—Boethius, Book IV, metre VII.

But, even if Chaucer had failed to notice the name in this passage in his previous hasty reading, he could not fail, when he came to make his translation, to note that the king who fed his mares on human flesh is here called Diomedes. If we assume, however, that Chaucer thought both names belonged to that tyrant, the occurrence of the name Diomedes would still, even when he considered the passage carefully, have had no significance to him in the way of pointing out his error in the tragedy of Hercules.²

III. AEOLUS IN THE HOUSE OF FAME

In ll. 1571-1605 of the *House of Fame* dealing with Aeolus, god of the winds, we have classical material perhaps from both Ovid and Virgil. The description in ll. 1583-90 of the god in his cave holding the winds in check is from *Aeneid* i. 52-57. Chaucer no doubt had had a long acquaintance with Aeolus from Ovid *Met.* i. 262-64:

Protinus Aeoliis Aquilonem claudit in antris
Et quaecumque fugant inductas flamina nubes,
Emittitque Notum.

¹ Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer*, III, 430, note.

² The name Diomedes in this passage does not belong to the text of Boethius, but is given, as will be noticed, in the gloss. As the explanations in Chaucer's translation are, however, probably not his own notes, but translations of glosses on the MS of Boethius which he used, or some MS which he had seen, this is of no consequence in the present discussion. For further information on the glosses see the *Globe Chaucer*, *Introd.*, p. xi; Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer*, II, *Introd.*, pp. xxiv and xxxviii.

and also from *Met.* xiv. 223-26:

Aeolon ille refert Tusco regnare profundo,
 Aeolon Hippotaden, cohibentem carcare ventos:
 Quos bovis inclusos tergo, memorabile munus,
 Dulichium sumpsisse ducem.

The incident of Fame's sending her messenger in haste to the cave of Aeolus recalls vividly the commission of Juno to the god of sleep in the *Book of the Duchess*. This latter episode is told by Ovid, *Met.* xi. 585-632.

The conception of Aeolus as a trumpeter deserves special consideration. None of the passages from the classics already referred to represents him with a trumpet. Professor Lounsbury¹ thinks this idea may have come to Chaucer from Albricus Philosophus, who has in a treatise called *De deorum imaginibus* the following passage: "In manu autem utraque tenebat cornua: quae ori ad-movens, ea subflare, et ab unoquoque cornum sex ventos emittere videbatur."

Probably, however, we need to look no farther than Virgil vi 162-74, for the idea of Aeolus as a trumpeter:

Atque illi Misenum in litore sicco,
 Ut venere, vident indigna morte peremptum,
 Misenum Aeoliden, quo non praestantior alter
 Aere ciere viros, Martemque accendere cantu.
 Hectoris hic magni fuerat comes; Hectora circum
 Et lituo pugnas insignis obibat et hasta.
 Postquam illum vita victor spoliavit Achilles;
 Dardanio Aeneae sese fortissimus heros
 Addiderat socium, non inferiora secutus.
 Sed tum, forte cava dum personat aequora concha,
 Demens, et cantu vocat in certamina divos,
 Aemulus exceptum Triton—si credere dignum est—
 Inter saxa virum spumosa immerserat unda.

¹ Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, II, 381-82. Lounsbury says Albricus Philosophus is described as a Londoner of the early part of the thirteenth century. "No dictionary of English biography contains his name or gives the slightest account of his life. The work by which he is known—if he can strictly be said to be known at all—is a treatise entitled *De deorum imaginibus*. It consists of a series of sketches of heathen gods and goddesses and of a few other mythological personages." This treatise, which is very short, is contained in Van Steveren's *Auctores mythographi Latini*. Albricus, to whom Lounsbury traces also slight obligations in the *Knight's Tale*, is mentioned in the *De causa Dei* of Bradwardine whose name appears in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Modern commentators have generally taken this Aeolus who was the father of Misenus to be a mortal and probably the man whose death is related in *Aeneid* xii. 542. But the father of Misenus was for a long time supposed by commentators to be Aeolus, god of the winds. Dryden¹ translated *Aeneid* vi. 164 as follows:

Misenus lay extended on the shore

Son of the God of the Winds: none so renown'd.

In a revision of Dryden's translation² in 1803 the editor allowed this passage to remain unchanged. Davidson in his translation of Virgil,³ also of 1803, understood this name to refer to the god of the winds and gives his explanation of why Misenus was called his son. In a note on *Aeneid* vi. 164, he says: "Misenus Aeoliden, Misenus, the son of Aeolus. This is only a figurative genealogy, as we call warriors sons of Mars, so Misenus, who excelled in blowing the trumpet, which is a wind instrument, is called a son of the god of the wind."

Not until the day of modern accurate scholarship do we come upon a different explanation of who this Aeolus was. In the Heyne-Wagner edition⁴ of 1832 occurs this comment on *Aeoliden*: "Aeolidum appellat Misenus, Aeoli filium, tanquam ejusdem Aeoli Trojani, quem in pugna cum Latinis occubuisse narrat, xii. 542 sq."

Anthon⁵ in his edition of Virgil sums up the matter thus: "Aeoliden, 'Son of Aeolus.' Many commentators suppose that as Misenus played upon a wind instrument, the poet, by a figurative genealogy, makes him the son of the wind god. Not so, however. Virgil calls him Aeolides, as indicating merely his descent from a natural father, named Aeolus, probably the same with the one who is said to have fallen in battle with the Latins (*Aen.* xii. 542 seq.—Heyne, Excurs. VII ad *Aen.* VI)." Roscher likewise considers the Aeolus here mentioned a mortal.⁶

¹ Dryden, *The Works of Virgil Translated into English Verse*, London, MDCCXXI, Vol. II, Bk. vi, ll. 242-43.

² Dryden, *The Works of Virgil Translated into English Verse*, ed. Carey, London, 1803, Vol. II, p. 220.

³ Davidson, *The Works of Virgil Trans. into Eng. Prose*, New York, 1803, Vol. II.

⁴ P. Virgilii Maronis opera, ed. Heyne-Wagner, Leipzig and London, 1830-41, Excursus VII to Book vi, 162 ff.

⁵ *The Aeneid of Virgil*, ed. Anthon, New York, 1853.

⁶ "Vgl. auch *Aen.* 6, 164 und 9, 774, wo Söhne eines Trojaners Aiolos (Misenus und Clytius) genannt werden."—*Ausführliches Lexikon der griech. u. röm. Mythologie*, Vol. I, p. 195. However, *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, 1897, gives again the old explanation that the Aeolus referred to here is the god of the winds.

In the light of this history of the commentary upon this name, it seems not an unwarranted assumption to suppose that Chaucer's knowledge was no more accurate than that of the commentators, and that he shared the common idea that the Aeolus here referred to was the god of the winds. As Misenus was called "son of Aeolus" because he was such a great trumpeter, the inference would naturally be that Aeolus himself was a great trumpeter. Thus it may have been that Chaucer got his impression that Aeolus was a trumpeter. The winds as a means of spreading tidings would be an easy conception to Chaucer. We say today of telling a secret to a gossiping person, "As well tell it to the winds." So Aeolus, god of the winds, with his mighty trumpet would make a suitable herald of renown. Altogether, then, it seems quite probable that Chaucer may have had no other source than Virgil for his conception of Aeolus with his trumpet acting as the herald of the goddess Fame.

But there is another source which may have furnished Chaucer an interpretation of this passage of Virgil's. Boccaccio in the *De genealogia deorum*, commenting upon Virgil's *Misenum Aeoliden*, not only takes this Aeolus to be the god of the winds but also offers an explanation of why a trumpeter should be called his son:

Misenus Aeoli fuit filius ut ait Virgilius. Misenum Aeoliden quo non praestantior alter Aere ciere viros, martemque accendere cantu. . . . Nunc quoniam simpliciter a Virgilio dicta vera non sunt, quod sit absconditum advertendum. Fingit ergo Misenum Aeoli filium eo que fuit tubicen: nam tubae sonus nil aliud est quam spiritus per fistulam ab ore emissus: sicuti et ventus et aer impulsus, et per terrae fistulas e cavernis emissus: et quia ventorum Aeolus deus dicatur, quasi eorum auctor sit: a similitudine operis Misenus ejus dicitur filius.¹

This commentary from a contemporary of Chaucer's no doubt indicates that this Aeolus was generally understood in the Middle Ages to be the god of the winds.

Triton, who is represented by Chaucer as the companion of Aeolus, was in classical mythology a famous trumpeter. He appears in the *Aeneid* three times at least as a sea-god. In i. 144, he is merely assisting in pushing off the ships that have been driven upon the sand by the storm. In ii. 173, the passage already quoted in the

¹ Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum*, 1511, Liber XIII, cap. xxlii.

discussion of Aeolus, Triton is represented as causing the death of Misenus, because Misenus had boasted of rivaling the gods with the blasts upon his trumpet. Again in *Aeneid* x. 209, Triton is referred to as a trumpeter:

Hunc vehit immanis Triton et caerula concha
Exterrens freta.

In Ovid *Met.* i. 330-42, there is a more detailed account of Triton and his trumpet:

Nec maris ira manet, positaque tricuspide telo
Mulcet aquas rector pelagi supraque profundum
Extantem atque umeros innato murice tectum
Caeruleum Tritona vocat, conchaeque sonanti
Inspirare iubet, fluctusque et flumina signo
Iam revocare dato, cava bucina sumitur illi
Tortilis, in latum quae turbine crescit ab imo,
Bucina, quae medio concepit ubi aëra ponto,
Litora voce replet sub utroque iacentia Phoebe.
Tunc quoque, ut ora dei madida rorantia barba
Contigit, et cecinit iussos inflata receptus,
Omnibus audita est telluris et aequoris undis,
Et quibus est undis audita, coërcuit omnes.

A mere knowledge of Triton as a trumpeter would of course have been sufficient to suggest him to Chaucer as a suitable person to accompany Aeolus on this journey to the palace of Fame, but it is especially significant that his name and function appear in the same passage from which it may be supposed that Chaucer derived his idea of using Aeolus as a herald of tidings.

Chaucer says Aeolus was to be found in Thrace:

In Trace ther ye shul him finde.
—*H.F.* 1572.

In a contree that highte Trace
This Aeolus with harde grace
Held the windes in distresse.
—*H.F.* 1585-87.

Now there is nothing in the *Aeneid* or in the *Metamorphoses* to indicate this connection of Aeolus with Thrace. Skeat¹ says the

¹ *Oxford Chaucer*, III, 279, note on l. 1571.

connection is not obvious but suggests that it may be based upon Ovid's phrase *Threicio Borea* in *Ars am.* ii. 431. It is possible that such a hint might have been sufficient to furnish Chaucer his idea, but there is another source which suggests more strongly the connection between Aeolus and Thrace. In the *Argonauticon* of Valerius Flaccus,¹ i. 596-610, there is an account of the rage of Boreas, whose home was on Pangaeus, a mountain of Thrace, against the Argonauts. All the winds, when they are let loose by Aeolus, are called in this account *Thraces equi*:

Nuntius hunc solis Boreas proturbat ab alto:
 Pangaea quod ab arce nefas, ait, Aeole vidi! .
 Graja novam ferro molem commenta juventus
 Pergit, et ingenti gaudens domat aequora velo:
 Nec mihi libertas imis freta tollere harenis.
 Quilis eram, nondum vinclis et carcere clausus!
 Huic animi structaeque viris fiducia puppis,
 Quod Borean sub rege vident. Da mergere Grajos,
 Insanamque ratem; nil me mea pignora tangunt,
 Tantum hominum compresce minas, dum litora juxta
 Thessala, nec dum aliae viderunt carbasa terrae
 Dixerat. At cuncti fremere intus et aequora venti
 Poscere. Tum valido contortam turbine portam
 Inpulit Hippotades: fundunt se carcere laeti
 Thraces equi: Zephyrusque, et nocti concolor alas
 Nimborum cum prole Notus; crinemque procellis
 Hispidus, et multa flavus caput Euris harena,
 Induxere hiemem.

In calling the winds Thracian horses Valerius Flaccus is following Apollonius Rhodius² who seems to place Aeolus in Thrace. Earlier in the account quoted from, Valerius mentions Aeolia as the home of Aeolus apparently following Virgil.³ In this same connection Valerius uses the adjectives Tyrrhenian⁴ and Trinacrian,⁵ but without a pretty thorough knowledge of classical geography, which we have

¹ Chaucer's acquaintance with Valerius Flaccus is still an unsettled point.

² Apollonius Rhodius i. 954; iv. 765.

³ *Aeneid* i. 52.

⁴ Continuo Aeolium Tyrrhenaque tendit ad antra
 Concitus (ll. 576-77).

⁵ Aequare Trinacrio, refugique a parte Pelori
 Stat rupes horrenda fretis ll. 579-80].

little reason to suppose Chaucer had, he might still have had a very hazy idea of the location of Aeolia. Especially is this likely when we consider that there were also apparently an Aeolia in Greece and one in Asia Minor. The reference to Thrace was plain, and Aeolia, a name derived from the god's own, might well have been supposed to indicate the immediate location of his abode in Thrace.

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